

Michigan Freedom Trail Commission Meeting Minutes

Bonine House, 18970 M-60, Vandalia, Michigan

June 3, 2016

Commissioners present: Tamara Barnes, Rochelle Danquah, Roy Finkenbine, Michael Nassaney, Robin Peebles, David Teeter

Conference Call: None

Excused: Juanita Moore, Edwina Murphy, James Turner

Absent: Ronald Brown, Earlie Eason

Staff present: Sandra Clark, Mary Patrick

Guests: Cathy LaPointe, Underground Railroad Society of Cass County

Danquah called the meeting to order at 11:07 PM. She thanked Cathy LaPointe for hosting the meeting at the Bonine House in Vandalia, and for providing a tour of the house.

Introductions: Commissioners introduced themselves to Ms. LaPointe who is treasurer of the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County. Ms. LaPointe spoke briefly about the many ties that Cass County has to the underground railroad. The society has worked hard to preserve and restore the Bonine House, as well as to research and tell the story of the underground railroad and its connection to the Bonine house.

Agenda: Finkenbine moved to approve the agenda; Teeter seconded the motion, and the agenda was approved unanimously.

Minutes: The February 2016 meeting minutes were not available. They will be reviewed at the August meeting.

Public Comment: None.

Action Items:

a. NTF Applications:

A list of the current NPS Network to Freedom Listings for Michigan was reviewed. Commissioners agreed to check on the accuracy and validity of listings:

- Teeter: Caroline Quarlls: A Family Legacy of Freedom; First Congregational Church of Detroit (confirm contact information);
- Nassaney: Free Soil Underground Railroad Sightseeing Bus Tour. He mentioned that Michelle Johnson recently led a tour and wondered if it is the Free Soil Tour or something else. Clark will check with Michelle Johnson to see what type of tour she's doing.
- Finkenbine: Journey to Freedom UGRR Tours (Washtenaw County);
- Patrick: International UGRR Heritage Program (locate contact information for Rhonda Green who is listed as the program's contact).

- Once sites are verified, Patrick will work with NPS to determine what stays on their list and what is no longer valid. Danquah asked Patrick to also check if there is an expiration date or time limit on items that are listed.

Danquah reported that she hopes to begin work on a nomination for the Warner House in Pontiac. It is thought to be connected to freedom seekers and Civil War soldiers that mustered out of that area. She is also researching a site in Farmington Hills that is a church and possibly a Quaker house; however, the house has been moved, so that may be an issue. LaPointe mentioned that Cass County has been offering tours during UGRR days since 2010. Commissioners encouraged her to submit a nomination for the tour. Kim Simmons is working on a nomination for the Skillman Branch of the Detroit Public Library. The Wright Museum could easily be added because of its facility and many programs. They are currently going through the accreditation process, however, so it may be some time before a nomination can be completed. Danquah may reach out to them and offer to help.

b. Strategic Agenda: Setting New Goals:

Peebles explained the various publications that are produced by Travel Michigan and how each can be utilized by the FTC to publicize events and publish articles. Clark noted that there are not currently many places where people can go and have an experience related to the UGRR. Peebles suggested Commissioners work with their local communities to package things to do so there's more than one reason for people to visit. Teeter noted that the First Congregational Church has combine with the Wright Museum on activities and programs. Danquah suggested that perhaps the Michigan Cycling Tour (Adventures in Cycling) could be brought back and included. Finkenbine noted that the sidebar tour currently goes through southeast Michigan and to Canada.

- The Pure Michigan newsletter goes out every 2-3 weeks and lists coming events, stories of interest to potential travelers looking for tips and ideas to assist them with travel plans—and even interesting historical facts about destinations around the state. Items intended for the newsletter should be sent to Peebles by the 5th of each month. Submissions should include facts and key dates. Travel Michigan will edit and finalize the meet newsletter criteria. A web link to more detailed information (beyond a phone number) should be included, and it should connect to a program, historic site, event page. Photos can be included.
- For the travel guide and magazine, an idea and background can be sent to Peebles, and an editor from TM's current publisher will make contact to write the article. The publisher will also arrange to have a photographer capture images for the article or reach out to trusted photographers for existing images should the piece be selected by TM for publication. Three travel guides are produced each year: Spring/Summer, Fall, and Winter. The Spring/Summer issue is finalized in February, and the Fall guide is completed in June. Peebles will provide coming release dates to Commissioners so that items can be submitted on a timely basis.

Clark suggested that the Detroit experience would make a good article for the magazine, and Teeter added that an article could be done about the UGRR in Michigan.

- Peebles will work with Patrick to provide a listing of deadlines and what types of things are best suited for the individual publications.

Reports:

- a. Staff: None.
- b. Chairperson: None.
- c. Vice Chair: Finkenbine reported that he made a presentation on “Love and Danger on the Underground Railroad: A Slave Couple’s Journey to Freedom, 1820,” at the Massillon, Ohio, Public Library. During a research trip to Richmond, Indiana, he discovered a detailed, original text recounting details of a ten-day journey by twenty-one freedom seekers from Richmond to Upper Canada in October 1825. He has continued to consult with the writing team for the Freedom Run mini-series for NBC-TV. Working with Carol Mull, he is researching an original document by a Methodist circuit rider that details the workings of the underground railroad connected to a house on the Raisin River in Monroe in 1822.
- d. Commissioner Reports: None.
- e. Standing Committees Updates:
Site, Facility and Program Identification (Danquah, Nassaney, invite Carol Mull): None.
 - Cultural and Heritage Tourism (Peebles, Teeter): None.
 - Preservation and Support (Barnes, Turner): None.
 - Education (Barnes, R. Brown, Finkenbine, Tucker): Finkenbine shared the beginnings of a draft of “Ideas for Educators,” and asked for commission input by August 1.

Danquah will ask Earlie Eason about her interest in the various committees. People that are recommended by FTC members to serve on a committee can be invited with a standard letter. For the Education committee, Barnes recommended Ruth, who works with kids and local history on the education programs in Cass County. She will ask about her interest, obtain her vita, and give the contact information to Finkenbine and Patrick. Each committee will have four members, with no more than two people from outside the FTC on one committee. Once the committees are established, an offer can be posted on the website inviting self-nomination. Interested parties can then send a vita and contact information to Patrick for vetting by the commission, and appointments can be made.

New Business:

- Danquah appointed a nominating committee consisting of Nassaney, Teeter and Peebles. They will report at the November meeting with recommendations for Chair and Vice Chair. Patrick will confirm the number of terms that each commissioner has served in their current positions.
- Danquah and Clark will review and update the bylaws.

News and Announcements: None.

Nassaney moved to adjourn the meeting, Finkenbine seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 12:23 PM. Following the meeting, Commissioners enjoyed lunch and a tour of Cass County led by Cathy LaPointe.

Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary